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AUTHOR Vail, Priscilla L.
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ABSTRACT

This two-part paper emphasizes the importance of language enrichment and active listening skills as a basis for reading pleasure. While acknowledging the need for developing fundamental decoding skills, the first section advocates that adults read aloud to children from books reflecting the adult's reading interests, containing creative language, and exposing the child to some of the universal themes of literature. Several significant children's books are discussed to illustrate methods for enriching the child's reading experience in this manner. Exercises in listening skill development comprise the second portion of the paper. These aim at developing reading comprehension through listening to words, both individually and in context, and by hearing a whole sentence as a complete unit of meaning. (MAI)

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LIMERENCE

Listening, Verbal Expression and Comprehension in Reading

By: Priscilla L. Vail

The New York Times introduced me to a new word several Saturdays ago, and I pass it along to you in case you missed it. A new word is a precious gift and this is a lovely one: limerence. It means being in love, or falling in love. I have a limerence for language and I want my students to feel the same way. I want each to be a language limerent. A wise person once said, "The goal of education is to infect students with non-poisonous passions." A child who develops a love of language and an ear for language is vulnerable to just such passions. Hooray. How can we encourage this vulnerability?

I believe that the child with reliable, fundamental skills will not be afraid of words, written or spoken, will have fun with them, will collect them like Star Wars cards, will not feel the need to treat them with undue reverence, and because he can listen to them and comprehend them, he will use them to express his ideas and emotions. The child thus builds a platform of language from which to launch abstract thinking. Such a child is free to venture, risk, learn and create.

The child who hasn't been taught these skills, or who lacks exposure, or who is language-impaired, diagnosed or undiagnosed, needs help. Without help, unfamiliarity will beget avoidance,

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which in turn reinforces the unfamiliarity, and thus a pattern is established. We can break that pattern by providing familiarity and informality. We can help the child play with words, embellish words, make big words (real and nonsense), coin words like limerence, find root words and invent words. Language is constantly changing and children, as well as grown-ups, should have some of the fun of that change.

The importance our culture places on reading as a skill often has the effect of cloaking it in mystery and robing it in unnecessary dignity. True it's a suitable tool for noble passions, but it also works for the Sears Roebuck catalogue, riddles, Vogue and off-track betting.

I think there are three different kinds of reading, each valid and each with a language of its own. Children as well as grown-ups need to be familiar with all of them and able to shift from one to another.

The first, and prerequisite to the others, is accuracy reading. Children associate it with school. In later life it's used for timetables, knitting directions, instructions from the Bureau of Motor Vehicles on how to renew your automobile registration, and income tax returns. And if you, as a parent, have ever had to put together an unassembled Apache Fort after midnight on Christmas Eve, you know all about accuracy reading!

The second kind is for covering lots of material, extracting main ideas, and spotting those areas in which further, more precise knowledge is needed. This kind is also associated with school and

is used later in life for reading the newspaper, studying a field of interest, and for collecting highlights and phrases to drop at cocktail parties.

The third kind seems to be a sort of secret society. It's called reading for pleasure. This kind needn't be wholly accurate, in fact I think it's better when it engages the reader's active and sometimes inventive participation. If you imagine Scarlet O'Hara in a green dress that's your privilege. I don't think it matters one whit that the book says it was yellow. This is the kind of reading you do in a hammock. It can be slow or speedy. It doesn't matter. This kind of reading is seldom associated with school, is slightly suspect and is a lot of fun!

There is one point I would like to stress. Picasso had mastered precise drawing before he took liberties with it. E. E. Cummings could write in iambic pentameter when the occasion demanded and Stravinsky understood the rhythm of Mozart and the harmony of Beethoven. I am in no way endorsing reading by drift. I was appalled to hear a Professor say recently to a class of potential reading teachers, "Do not allow children to get into the habit of reading aloud, or reading word by word. Instead they should read to themselves from the very beginning and infer the meaning of unknown or unfamiliar words." I strongly challenge this point of view for the beginning reader or the reader who has had trouble learning to decode. I believe we must honor children's intellects by seeing to it that they have a well sharpened tool for decoding their world. Let us not send them out to chop wood

with blunt axes. That is not only time-consuming and frustrating; it is dangerous! Reading without receiving anything useful is not only non-productive, it is dangerous.

Encouraging a child to confuse some vague mental meandering with real reading is dealing a potentially deadly blow to the child's self-concept. The world is big and confusing to children. The printed page is meant to offer knowledge and understanding, and provides these to people on all sides. Children who take senseless gibberish from this same source must infer that they are either stupid or crazy. It is our job as teachers to make sure that fundamental decoding skills are intact before asking them to read quickly, or to skim, or to substitute green dresses for yellow ones. In my experience children do not resent this. In fact, they rather delight in knowing that a message exists, it's written in code, and learning how to crack that code. Detective work is fun, and I see them enjoying code-cracking for its own sake. They are little 007's, solving mysteries and feeling a glow of satisfaction when they've done it.

For the beginning reader we must separate accuracy in deciphering from linguistic pleasure. These two things must be taught separately, even though they are flip sides of the language coin.

Today's Question:

Is there life after decoding?

Many parents and some teachers groan at the prospect of reading aloud to children. And yet, consider the wise words of Dolores Durkin, "Language is more caught than taught." There is no greater way to expose a child to language than to read aloud to nim. I'm going to use "him" because statistically boys need more language help than girls and at the same time parents (and I'm afraid some teachers) are more apt to read to girls than to boys.

In addition to enhancing language, reading aloud has at least five other benefits we should consider.

1. Concept development and the intake of new information.

2. Awareness of the existence of, and difference among, biography, adventure, poetry, propaganda and romance (to name a few).

3. The comfort of bibliotherapy when needed.

4. The opportunity to feel empathy.

5. The opportunity to share feelings and experiences with a group, be it a family group or a class.

These are important benefits for all children, but they are vital nourishment for the disabled reader.

In trying to puzzle out the reasons for parental reluctance to read aloud (and laziness generally isn't one), I've unearthed some surprising fears and foibles which should be interesting to us as teachers.

The first is a fear that in some way it is "spoiling" the child to read to him once he theoretically has learned to read by himself. "Shouldn't he be reading to me?", a parent will say. "After all, he's learning to read in school. Shouldn't he practice

at home?" Yes, if he wants, but that is no substitute for reading aloud at home or at school. It will be years before the child can read on his own the kind of language and vocabulary he needs to hear in stories.

A child whose personal lexicon is filled with words of texture, strength and nuance not only has many ways of expressing his own thoughts, but many ways to meet the writer when he comes to later, more sophisticated reading. So much of the reading we all do consists of matching the expectation in our head to what our eyes find as they travel along a line of print. Katrina de Hirsch refers to this as "casting a linguistic shadow." With it the reader can move right along at a pace which allows for appreciation of cadence, rhythm and humor. Without it, the process of analyzing each word, one at a time, is so cumbersome, and takes so much attentional energy, that the beginning of all but the shortest sentences has been forgotten by the end. All humor, except the comic strip, is lost to such a reader. Even the pun will probably slide away.

The child who relies only on phonics will read laboriously. The child who only knows how to read sight words would do well in China where language is ideographic, but will be stumped by the unfamiliar in English. Worry about the child who ignores context clues in reading and as a result reads house for horse. When asked "Does that make sense?" this child is apt to answer, "No, but that's what it says."

While the child of an architect and the child who lives on a farm are not immune to a house/horse error, it's probably a mistake neither would make. Language is a powerful context clue.

It's what joins reading and common sense.

As is often the case, children make your point for you, as two nine year olds did for me last year. One child is a constant storyteller, storylistener, storylover who has had quite a difficult time learning to read. The other is an obedient little child with tight pigtails who was literally language impoverished. I don't think she had ever had a story read just to her. They were working together, rehearsing a short play with a jungle setting. They read these two sentences.

> One said, "Quit it. There's a hung elephant. Wait for my single."
>
> The other said "Quiet! There's a huge elephant. Wait for my signal."

I'm sure you have no trouble deciding which sentence belongs to which child. A child who is used to rhythm, dialogue, cadence and story line would be virtually incapable of making an error such as that one. Do not be afraid, and do not let the parents who seek your help be afraid,of spoiling a child by reading to him. Let him catch language from you through literature.

"But what should I read?" is the next question and touches on another fear and foible; one to which parents are particularly susceptible. One fear is that they won't know how to pick "the right book" and flanked by this is a fear that if they give in they'll be chained forever to reading "Freddy and His Tractor" or "Debbie Takes a Nap". Ghastly! Freddie and His Tractor is a boring, hateful little book - but notso little that it doesn't take a whole half hour to read,and don't try to skip. There is a quality

in some books written for children which makes reading them humiliating to even a dedicated, self-sacrificing parent. The parent will read it if forced to but not take it seriously, remaining apart from it. The child detects both the distaste and aloofness immediately, and lacking in experience, attributes it to the activity, not the literary selection. The parent's noble sacrifice is useless and the child is disappointed.

Here's a different way of approaching the problem which may do away with both fears and foibles. Help the adult find his or her own favorite kind of story, written on a level appropriate for young listeners. Then the adult taste can be honored while the child is being introduced to something pleasurable and new. The fun is in identifying some patterns and then seeing how often we can find them. Each time a child does this, it helps him develop an awareness of these patterns. Each heightened perception augments enjoyment and understanding. The linguistic shadow can be as important here as it is in sentence structure.

I believe you can find entertaining and important literary themes in well-written children's books, as well as in the classics and books written for the adult popular market. Great dreams and stories are found in slender volumes as well as in thick ones. A book is not a sirloin steak which needs to measure two inches thick to merit adult attention and whet the appetite, though many adults don't know this - yet.

For our purposes here, let's take three themes and see if the idea works. For the first, let's try this one:

PSYCHOLOGICAL FORCES AT WORK IN THE COMMUNITY: pity, greed, passion, sacrifice, love and death. For a first grader? Yes.

Consider War and Peace, Gone with the Wind, Middlemarch and Charlotte's Web. In this exercise, I'll say they are all the same story. They come in different depths and on different levels, to be sure, but they are still the same story. The first three (the so-called adult ones) are laced with social and political history. All kinds of people and many kinds of values are represented. Economics collide with idealism against an agrarian backdrop. The same is true of the fourth!

I dare the scholar's scorn as I write this, but can you return these two quotes to their rightful covers?

> "Although he loved her children and her grandchildren dearly, none of the new ones ever quite took her place in his heart. She was in a class by herself. It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. _____ was both."

> "For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who have lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs."

In Charlotte's Web some of the characters are animals, but they act the way people act. They have dilemmas, as real people do, and a human balance of good and bad qualities apiece. Even Templeton, the rat, has moments when the noblest among us must identify with him.

Fern and her father collide early in the story. Mr. Arable, knowledgeable farmer, well meaning father, keeper of the Ten

Commandments, and also family provider, appears to Fern as a cruel supporter of a double standard. Her vision has not yet been clouded by worldly compromise between money and morality. Their disagreement involves a choice between practicality and compassion. Should Wilbur be killed? Which should win? What of the leader who makes the cold blooded choice? How would you feel about him as a father, as a husband, as a town councilor, a tax collector, a minister, or perhaps a doctor? If he were your physician, would you dare to get sick? The arguments on each side are familiar to readers of New Testament parables, Sinclair Lewis and the Watergate Tapes, as well as the four books under discussion.

How many of us have shared this with Wilbur? "Wilbur was merely suffering the doubts and fears that often go with finding a new friend. In good time he was to discover that he was mistaken about Charlotte. Underneath her bold and cruel exterior she had a kind heart and she was to prove loyal and true to the very end."

Or this, "Charlotte, I don't want to die!"

Charlotte is the practical achiever, as are the team of Arable and Zuckerman. Both are loving, both are sure of right as they see it but they are on opposite sides. Who will win and how can the author apportion victory without defeating virtue?

In the case of Charlotte's Web, the device is just the same as it is in the other stories. It's done by shifting the focus to a newly developing trait in a familiar character. The balance of the story is thus instantly shifted and a new tack is permissible. Enter love! - a new kind. I'm not going to try to draw any

parallels between Rhett Butler and Henry Fussy - but don't tell Fern!

There are the other citizens of every town, every life, and every other good story of this kind; the gossip who spreads the news and repeats herself (in Charlotte's Web it's the goose). There is the caste-conscious snob, "lambs don't play with pigs" - the same way Montagues don't talk to Capulets, Frenchmen don't do business with Germans, and 4th graders don't sit beside 2nd graders on the schoolbus.

And who is a more familiar character than the anxious Mother, proud of an untidy son and worried about a daughter who is not yet socially mature? No surprise when she is comforted by a kindly, wise old country Doctor.

Wall Street, Russia and the Old South know the men of affairs whose efforts succeed; So does E. B. White.

> "A great feeling of happiness swept over the Zuckermans and the Arables. This was the greatest moment in Mr. Zuckerman's life. It is deeply satisfying to win a prize in front of a lot of people."

It's all there in 184 pages which bring forth tears, laughter, suspense and transportation into another world. "Salutations", as Charlotte herself might say, to all writers who are "humble", "versatile" and "radiant".

One might imagine George Eliot, E. B. White, Margaret Mitchell or Tolstoy saying of their artistic aim, "It is not to resolve a question irrefutably, but to compel one to love life in all its manifestations - and these are inexhaustible."

Which one said this?

> "If I were told that I could write a novel in which I could indisputably establish as true my point of view on all social questions, I would not dedicate two hours to such a work; but if I were told that what I wrote would be read 20 years from now by those who are children today, and that they would weep and laugh over it, and fall in love with the life in it, then I would dedicate all my existence and all my power to it."

This description fits all four books. It was written by Tolstoy.

I am not advocating that Charlotte's Web take the place of War and Peace, or either of the other two books, but I am suggesting that the adult who enjoys one will enjoy the others, and the child who is introduced to this kind of book by way of a book like Charlotte's Web will find the territory hospitable and familiar, and hence will probably journey there independently in later years, and there are many, many other books, beautifully written, which fit in this category.

Shall we try HUMAN NATURE: good or evil?

Children (and philosophers) have wondered about this for ever. Is it gentle and benevolent, to be encouraged and set free? Is it dangerous, something which must be contained by powerful bonds?

If you feel like wrestling with the good or evil question (it's good in January) there are many ways of enticing the child into your realm without forcing him to blow his cover - which would not be fair.

One way is to start by making a collage - it could be one of the class as a group, or, each member of the class could make one. Start with a huge stack of magazines, a shirt cardboard for

each collage, some newspapers and catalogues. The latter are vitally important, because catalogues make people look athletic, or stylish or intellectual, or slender according to their bias, and each person's collage should have a good dose of wish fulfillment. Take your scissors and cut out pictures of anything you think describes you, or the group. Don't forget words, either by themselves or made from cut-out letters. The more variety you get, the better. Along with the picture of you in stretch pants, don't forget to put the picture of the ice-cream sundae you never can resist, or a few words that aren't laudatory; broke, tired, on edge, and plump are a few I might choose for myself. Paste them on the cardboard in whatever way makes an interesting design, and is pleasing to your eye. Just the process of sharing the magazines, cutting, pasting and laughing over the finished product (and assessing its accuracy) is a perfect preamble to an intellectually difficult task.

The mark of a mature mind is to be able to hold two opposing ideas at once which is to say, to be comfortable with ambiguity. Don't expect this of most children below the age of eleven or twelve, which, as we know from Piaget, is the age when abstract thinking develops as part of formal operations. For children younger than this, the simple process of sorting good from bad is fun, and lays good foundations for later more complicated thinking. A wonderful book to begin with might be <u>The Bad Island</u> by by William Steig. For majestic language it can't be matched. There are huge rumbling words children love to hear long before

they can pronounce them or use them independently.

The Start of the Battle

> "Eventually things really got out of hand, or out of claw and talon. From blaming, and cursing and insulting, and threatening and insulting and hitting, they went on to serious fighting. And all their deepest demons of hate broke loose. Much as they had all loathed and abominated one another before, it was nothing compared to the way they loathed and abominated now. But loathing and abominating no longer gave them enjoyment."

The Battle

> "It went on and on and on and one day it was finally over. Everyone had succeeded in killing everyone else off. The last ugly ogre had given his last ugly gasp and the last serpent breathed its last flame and the island was a gigantic heap of dead, scaly, thorny, fanged, horned, bug-eyed, barbed, bristling, saw-toothed carcasses, lying in ashes and embers, burning and giving off a dark, horrible smoke. And then there was nothing but hot ashes."

The denouement belongs to Steig and his readers, but there is no ambiguity. His good is as good as his evil is evil. What fun! And no, the children won't be scared. Progress from there to sorting good children from bad children. A Child's Garden of Verses is ideal for this, as are Cautionary Tales by Hilaire Belloc, or the Goop Books. They are fun to read aloud. Even a child who would otherwise feel too old to be reading "baby-stuff" will enjoy reading children's poetry searching for adult distinctions. And all children's will feel a warm rush of superiority reading about other children who are totally bad. Then, with your collages spread out in front of you, read parts of Walt Whitman's Song of Myself. A word of caution. I feel about that the way I do about the Museum of Natural History. The temptation is to go from the Hall of African Mammals, to the Dinosaurs, to the Plains Indians,

to the Blue Whale, then the Hall of Gems and Minerals, saving the Planetarium for last.

Don't.

Choose one and force yourself to leave after you've seen it. The same is true of the Song of Myself. Take a little section at a time. Then, if you would feel comfortable with this next step, set up a dialectic between Whitman in this poem and Golding in Lord of the Flies. The latter is something you can read and retell to children of almost any age, distilling and embroidering as seems appropriate. There are so many parallels the child will bring in from real life: rules in school for instance. Are they necessary? Would people be the same without them? Who should enforce them? What is scary, and what makes people feel safe?

One discussion of this led a father to say of his daughter's observations, "I feel exactly the same way she does - except she's talking about the playground and coming home from school, and I was thinking about the office and commuting." (He is highly placed in the New York corporate scene.)

Hans Christian Anderson's The Little Mermaid is a prismed view of what it means to be human. With this in one hand and Ann Lindberg's poem about the Mermaid in the other, you have a feast for mind and soul of any age.

Let's try a little magic. "People think I am_____, but really I am_____ " is taken from Kenneth Koch in Wishes, Lies, and Dreams. One of the reasons it works is that its a daydream common to all of us.

Breathes there a person who does not identify with Walter Mitty?

Wasn't George Plimpton taking a thrilling step for himself - and a comforting step for the rest of us, when, in his role of average man, he played with the football team and conducted the orchestra? "People think I'm an average Joe, but really I can _____." (Fill in the blank as you will.

How many of us, when looking in the mirror, love to see a double image; first, Clark Kent, Mild-Mannered Reporter for a Major Metropolitan Newspaper and second, silhouetted behind him, - faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings at a single bound - synthesis of dreams come true - Superman.

In all these stories and poems, the small or unassuming triumphs over seemingly overwhelming forces, sometimes because of secret powers, sometimes because right makes might, and sometimes because brain is more important than brawn.

The story of David and Goliath is one perfect example. So is Puss in Boots in which the seemingly worthless cat brings wealth and the hand of the Princess to his master. In The Bad Island, one little flower conquers all. And, in The Brave Cowboy, by Joan W. Anglund, the small boy wearing a cowboy hat, playing near his front door, is in fact intrepid explorer, successful hunter of vicious beasts and champion of the right, through relentless war against outlaws.

Children need these fantasies in order to feel some sense

of control in their lives. If they can be strong and big, they can lead their lives by decision not by default. If they are always small, and their parents, the world (and siblings) are always big, they cannot. Passivity is the product of ineffectiveness (and of course this perpetuates itself) but growing up is an aggressive activity. Children need to be able to try on the mantle of power without being mocked. This kind of story provides such an opportunity, and provides it without the risk of guilt, a stiff price to pay for pretending.

Now you know the trick - it's finding what Henry James called "The figure in the carpet".

As recognition in language (the casting of the linquistic shadow) is prerequisite to real reading, so recognition of a literary themeadds both familiarity and extra dimension to enjoyment of the printed word.

I once heard a concert of brasses in which the musicians talked about melody and various musical forms: waltzes, marches, scherzos, to name a few. Then they played Jinge Bells in each one. You should hear it as a chorale - it brings tears to the eyes! We, adults and children together, learned to discover the pattern as well as recognize the melody. The same thing can be done with literature.

The categories and titles included here are not meant to be encompassing - merely encouraging. You will find others you prefer, or that you want to add. The main thing is to recognize the groundless snobbery and discomfort many people bring to their perception of children's books, and to see the common

qualities they share with adult books -"chapter books" - when both are well written.

I have a bibliography of themes and title you're welcome to look over later. Feel free to copy anything you like.

Pick the kind of book you enjoy reading and find it on a level appropriate to the child, or children, you want to read with. Do not be afraid of forcing your taste on them. Enthusiasm is contagious. At best you will introduce the child to something you enjoy at a level satisfying to him. Chances are this alone will produce a life-long convert. You are, in effect, taking him on a trip to a country always accessible to reexploration. At the least, the child will enjoy your willingness, physical closeness and attention as you sit together and share language.

Let him catch it from you.

LISTENING

Listening and reading are both receptive language activities. As listening and speaking are language laid out in time, reading and writing are language laid out in space. Written language is constant. You can refer back to it if you need to. The other (spoken language) is gone in an instant. It hangs in the air for a moment and then is gone. The trick is to teach the child ways of processing and remembering spoken language. If he can join the auditory to the visual through imagery or to language through association he has a double shot at retrieval and memory.

I'd like to start our section on Listening with two quotes from the NAIS Teachers Notebook, and then talk about listening in general for a few minutes

1. "Passivity, a result of the tremendous amount of time many children spend with television, can cause them to be dependent on visual representation for comprehension. When they are deprived of pictures they are often unable to form mental images, to listen discriminatingly, or to question selectively what they hear." NAIS Teacher's Notebook on Language Arts k-4 1973.

2. "Auditory memory is affected by anxiety, plus inattention, lack of familiarity with the language or dialect of the speaker, or inadequate experience "

We must differentiate between active and passive listening. We require active listening for schoolwork, but as a culture we encourage passive listening or non-listening. We automatically turn on the radio in our cars, not so much to hear the news, or

listen to the words or harmony of a song, but to blot out other sounds and free us to ramble in our own thoughts. It functions as what is called "white sound". We frequently don't listen to one another, though we try to give a polite impression through the social grace of eye-contact. This is a skill one hones carefully in church during many sermons and in the classroom as a student. If you look at the teacher intently, you will seldom be called on suddenly, the way you surely will if you're looking out the window. Most of you are giving the impression of listening to what I'm saying, but I'm sure some of you are planning the weekend menus or remembering last summer's trip. As a teacher don't be fooled by the appearance of listening as I was. I was working hard with one child. It was a lesson on vowel teams. As it progressed, I thought to myself how wonderful it was; child, teacher and concept joined together under a banner of concentration. She was looking at me intently, and finally said "Can I ask you a question?" "Of course," I said, thinking how exciting it is to transmit knowledge. She said, "Do you have chapped lips?"

So much for that lesson on vowel teams.

I would like to separate active listening into three categories. These are not scientifically delineated, they are from practical experience - simply "observations from the trenches."

Listening and Analyses:

This is a focusing kind, an auditory microscope, if you will. It involves hearing the number of sounds in a word, the

number of syllables in a word, and the number of words in a sentence. Isabelle Liberman among others has written on the segmentation of the spoken word. There are numerous counting games you can play to help children tune their ears to these distinctions. Games which involve changing the first, middle or final sound of a word are helpful too.

Listening and Information

This is rather like a sprint. It requires tremendous effort for a few minutes but needn't be sustained all day - in fact, it couldn't be. If you have trouble remembering travelling directions, share this with the children. Encourage them to help themselves by doing what you probably do.

Make a mental image
Take notes either in words or rebus
Repeat the directions aloud.

Listening and Aesthetics

This is more sustained and requires involvement on the part of the child. He brings his own emotions, experiences and preferences to it. It is found in the theatre, in music with and without words, in hearing literature read aloud, or in recordings of plays, stories or poems.

Caution: For the child who simply needs practice expand all listening activities as rapidly as you wish, and embroider them as richly as you like. For the child who has an attention problem, or a processing problem pare your words down. Use as few as possible and try to provide a visual accompaniment -

either in written words, rebus or pantomine.

Language

Carl Sagan tells the apocryphal story of the computer famous for translations. It turned "Out of sight, out of mind" into "invisible idiot", a perfect illustration of mechanical language, accurate but meaningless! Consider these two quotations: from a report card, "This boy must not become dissolutioned."; at the supper table, "Last year's soccer team was underfeeted." Would that I could draw! We need to think about language and words, and teach our children to understand them, not just mouthe them. After all - who needs to be ill with Blue Bonnet Plague?

The polite child who learned obediently to decode in first and second grade but who begins to flounder in third grade may well be telling you he doesn't need help in phonics, he needs help in syntax, and punctuation and the meaning of what he is reading - in other words, language.

It used to be thought that language developed as a result of reading and other print-based activities. Current research tells us that the existence of language inside the child is prerequisite. The language has to exist inside the child to give incoming information something to stick to. When it is there, the language and the new information join together like the two sides of a closing zipper. When the language is not there the new information runs off the way salad dressing is

meant to run off Scotchguard. The child who drops his voice at the end of the printed line instead of at the period, and then starts up again, falsetto, at the beginning of the next line, needs help in hearing whole sentences. (And it's a sure thing he won't speak them or write them if he doesn't hear them.) To help a child who does this, you might say, "I'm going to read this section to you two ways. Then you choose which one sounds right to you." He'll choose the right one probably. Then you can say, "Good. You listened well and chose the correct one." He'll be pleased. You can then mark the book with red lines under the periods for stop, orange under the commas for a pause, and using these visual clues, move on to better reading.

'Our society converses in inflections. If you doubt me, go to McDonald's - ketchup? mustard! Root Beer! Napkins.

When language activities expand according to the way language itself develops, the teacher can meet the child where he is in his own language development, match the activity to that level, and grow from there. (It goes without saying that one cannot express what one does not have and therefore receptive language is prerequisite to expressive language.) In expressive language activities, gesture may grow to pantomine, which may grow to charades, and then on to full scale drama. Labelling, synonyms, and word trains may expand to sequenced stories and then on to the more abstract realm of analogy.

From here on the only limit is set by the understanding of the child - or the teacher.

Conclusion

Learning is aggressive. Reading is aggressive. The passive child may obediently learn to decode, but won't fall over the edge. He needs language and anticipation to invest himself in what he's reading. It needs to be worth his while. Back to Limerence. As a word, it stuck in my mind right away because it had two associations for me: first it reminded me of limerick, and thus humor, and second of luminous, and thus illumination and the light of understanding. What greater contributions can a teacher make to a child's life than humor and light?